DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 263 665 EA 018 052

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TITLE Staff Development at the Middle Level School.
PUB DATE Jan 85
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (69th, New Orleans, LA, January 25-29, 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Administration; Educational Assessment; Educational Objectives; *Educational Planning; *Inservice Education; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; Leadership; *Preadolescents; Principals; Program Development; *Staff Development; Staff Orientation

ABSTRACT

Middle level schools have special needs because of the characteristics of the age group served. Staff development is crucial for middle schools. Its purposes and major planning components are presented in this paper. Most mid-level educators were prepared for elementary or high school teaching and have a limited knowledge of early adolescent needs. A good staff development program can develop the skills necessary to build a staff dedicated and committed to meeting pre-adolescent students' needs. The primary emphasis of successful programs should be to change teacher's attitudes and behavior. The hierarchy of staff development purposes has four levels; awareness, skill development (existing programs), new program development, and skill development (new programs). Using this hierarchy of purposes can help programs in developing planning and implementation. Once a purpose is established the plan is developed by: determining needs, planning, implementation, and evaluation. Needs are determined by assessing faculty, student profiles, and parent/community data. Planning determines who is to be involved and used as consultants and resources, and establishes goals and objectives. When implementing the plan it is important to personalize the program to the needs of teachers. The final step, evaluation, uses a variety of techniques to gather data. These include questionnaires, observation, interviews, and student achievement data. The principal's leadership is key to the success of staff development programing. (MD)

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT AT THE MIDDLE LEVEL SCHOOL

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To the

69th Annual Conference of the
National Association of Secondary School Principals
New Orleans, Louisiana
January 25 - 29, 1985

EA 018 052

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AT THE MIDDLE LEVEL SCHOOL

Over the past two decades we have become increasingly aware of the special needs of early adolescence and of the lack of programs developed to meet those special needs. It seems that at the time when we are realizing how unique the characteristics of early adolescents are and what dramatic changes they are making, the school programs that really meet their needs are still the least known, the least understood, and oftentimes the least supported. We firmly believe that middle level schools can be organized to meet the unique characteristics of this particular age group. We would like to focus on staff development at the middle level, why it is so crucial, its purposes, and the major components in its planning. We will also be giving some specific examples of needs assesment instruments and will be describing the important leadership role of the building administrator.

Importance of Staff Development at the Middle Level

Transparency #1

IMPORTANCE OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT
FOR MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATORS

*Most Middle Level Educators Have Been Trained for Elementary or High School Teaching

*Many Middle Level Educators Have Limited Knowledge about the Characteristics of Early Adolescents

*Many Middle Level Educators wish to Improve Their School but Lack the Knowledge and Skill to do so

*Parents, Community, and School Board Members are Calling for More Relevent Middle Level Programs

*Declining Enrollment at the High School Level has Forced High School Teachers into Middle Level Teaching Positions

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Why is staff development so crucial at the middle level school? We believe there are several reasons. First of all, most middle level educators have been prepared for elementary or high school teaching. As a result, most of these teachers have only a limited knowledge of early adolescent needs and of suitable educational programs for meeting these needs. Secondly, declining enrollments at the high school level have forced many high school teachers into middle level teaching positions. In addition to being forced into a teaching position they do not desire, these teachers lack both the knowledge and experiential base to deal effectively with early adolescents. Finally, parent, community, and school board members are calling for more relevant and effective middle level programs. To do this a staff is needed who is cognizant of curricular programs that are well suited to this age group, and skilled

in planning and change processes.

Most colleges of education do not focus on the preparation of middle level teachers. As a consequence, little emphasis is placed on the developmental characteristics of early adolescents and on how these developmental characteristics should constitute a basis for program planning. There are very few state departments of education that even designate anyone as being able to offer help in middle level curriculum development. This lack of assistance is crucial because we are all aware of the increased pressure from school board members, from parents, and from members of the community for doing a more effective job. Yet, as middle level educators, we are left with the task of building effective schools with inadequately trained teachers and poorly informed local and state officials.

We believe that the success, maybe even the survival, of good middle level programs depends on teachers and administrators who are committed and dedicated to working with early adolescents. A good staff development program holds the key to developing the skills necessary to build that dedicated and committed staff.

Transparency #2

TYPICAL REQUESTS FOR MIDDLE LEVEL
STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

*Interdisciplinary Team Teaching
*Information about the Characteristics of Early Adolescents
*Implementing Advisor/Advisee Programs
*Planning a Responsive Middle Level School
*Involvement of Teachers, Parents, and Community Members in Program Development

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We receive many requests from administrators for assistance in changing their current programs to be more responsive to the special needs of the early adolescent. These principals, who typically ask for help in establishing new programs, are really asking, "How do I organize a good staff development program?" "How do I get my teachers involved?" "How do I get them to change?" These questions will serve as the basis for our remining comments.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT: DEFINITION AND PURPOSES

Transparency #3

DEFINITION

"The provision of activities designed to advance the knowledge, skills, and understanding of teachers in ways that lead to changes in their thinking and classroom behavior."

Gary Fenstermacher
David Berliner, 1983

Staff development has many definitions, but the definition we prefer comes from a monograph written by Gary Fenstermacher and David Berliner. They define staff development as, "The provision of activities

designed to advance the knowledge, skills, and understanding of teachers in ways that lead to changes in their thinking and classroom behavior." We like this definition because it places the primary emphasis of staff development on changing teachers' attitudes and classroom behavior.

Transparency #4

HIERARCHY OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT PURPOSES

4. Skill Development - New Programs

3. New Program Development

2. Skill Development - Existing Programs

1. Awareness - Information

In designing a staff development program you must first of all be aware of your purposes. What do you expect to accomplish as a result of the program? We have found it helpful when examining the purposes of staff development to place them on a hierarchy much like the format used in Bloom's Taxonomy. Our hierarchy of staff development purposes has four levels, which include:

* Awareness - Information
* Skill Development - Existing Programs
* New Program Development
* Skill Development - New Programs

The first level of the hierarchy focuses on building awareness and development of an information base. As a principal of a school you may have noticed that your teachers have a very poor understanding of early adolescents and their needs. Because you believe that this information is important, your purpose for staff development is to build awareness. As a result, you provide reading materials, schedule speakers, arrange for teachers to visit other schools, and also to attend conferences.

At the second level, emphasis is placed upon skill development for existing programs. Some of you may be working in clinical supervision programs where you have to evaluate a teacher and then mutually develop a program to improve that teacher's skills in an already existing program. Others of you may be working with the improvement of classroom management, teaching strategies, or curriculum planning. These are all purposes that fall into this level of skill development for existing programs.

The third level deals with new program planning. We believe that staff development should encompass program planning and innovation. Most middle level educators have seen significant changes take place in the thinking and writing about middle/junior high schools and the kinds of programs that should be available to early adolescents. At this third level of the hierarchy the planning process is implemented, and teachers, administrators, parents, and community members are involved in numerous planning sessions. The process includes the assessment of student needs and the identification of parent and community wishes and desires. Current literature on effective middle level schools is examined, successful schools are visited, and staff strengths and weaknesses are assessed. This data provides the basis on which the new program is developed.

The last or highest level of the hierarchy of purposes is skill development for new programs. Once the new program has been developed, you will find that many of your teachers do not have the skills that they need to implement these programs. Your purpose now becomes to plan a staff development program that will equip your teachers with the necessary skills to be successful. Workshops or extension classes and lots of

opportunities for practice with supervision must be provided. The topics you would focus on would be those specific skills that have been identified by teachers and administrators as being necessary for implementation of the new programs.

Using this hierarchy of purposes will be most helpful in organizing and planning staff development programs. If you know what the specific purpose is, you can be very specific in your planning and implementation.

Transparency #5

ELEMENTS OF THE STAFF DEVELOPMENT PLAN

1. Determine Needs
2. Planning
3. Implementation
4. Evaluation

Once you have identified your purpose, it is time to build your staff development plan. No matter which one of the four purposes you select, you will use the same four elements for your staff development plan. These include:

* Determining Needs
* Planning
* Implementation
* Evaluation

Transparency #6

THE STAFF DEVELOPMENT PLAN

1. DETERMINE NEEDS

* Faculty Assessment
* Student Profiles
* Parent/Community Data

Determining needs is an important first step in developing your plan. We believe that there are three major areas that need to be examined. These are faculty assessment data, student profiles, and parent and community information.

The faculty needs to be assessed to determine their knowledge of early adolescent characteristics. No successful middle level program can be developed and implemented unless the faculty and staff thoroughly understand the students they are educating. The faculty also needs to be assessed to determine the extent of their knowledge of successful middle level programs. If you are going to be developing new programs, you ought to know what programs are successful. Another area of faculty assessment should include the identification of school strengths and weaknesses. This can be done simply by asking teachers to identify the major strengths and weaknesses of their school. For each weakness they identify they should be asked to make a suggestion for improvement. Determination of teacher skill competency is the last area of faculty assessment. In developing a new program, it is of vital importance that the principal know what the skills of his or her faculty are. This can be done by using an instrument we developed entitled: MIDDLE LEVEL STAFF DEVELOPMENT - DETERMINING COMPETENCY AND INTEREST. This instrument allows a principal to determine level of perceived skill and level of interest in acquiring skill in fifty different skills and competencies commonly found in most successful middle level schools.

In determining needs, student needs and parent/community opinion needs to be assessed. Student profiles become important data bases for program planning. This data base should include scores on standardized tests, grades, participation in school activities, and special needs.

It is also important to have some information on self-concept, attitudes, and emotional and physical development. There are some very good instruments that do a good job of measuring this.

Finally, we think we need to have some feeling from the parents and the community as to what they feel are the school's strengths and weaknesses. Their perceptions about the school and the direction they believe it should take are very important. This information is readily available through questionnaires and "town hall" type meetings.

Transparency #7

THE STAFF DEVELOPMENT PLAN

2. PLANNING

* Identify Participants

* Develop the Plan

Once the needs have been determined, a basis exists for planning. In planning, which is the second step in the Staff Development Plan, participants must be identified and the plan must be developed. Who is going to be involved in planning? Who will be the providers, the consultants, or resource prople? Who will be the recipients? Who will be the evaluators? In most cases the planners, the recipients, and the evaluators will consist of the school's administrators and teachers. Consultants and resource people may also come from the staff but most often they come from the central office or nearby universities.

The planners initial task is to establish the goals and objectives for the staff development program. These objectives should state the specific skills and competencies to be learned. These objectives should

be stated in terms of specific teacher performance. Planners also need to identify the specific strategies that will be used for developing these skills. In the process of determining strategies, consultants and resource people should be identified. Finally, evaluation procedures must be determined. What procedures will you use to determine the success of the program? How will you determine what changes take place in teachers' classroom behavior?

Transparency #8

THE STAFF DEVELOPMENT PLAN

3. IMPLEMENTATION

* Notify Participants

* Instruction of Teachers According to Mutually Developed Plan

* Follow-up Support

Implementation is the next step in the staff development plan. Once you have a plan you put it into action. You notify the participants of the goals, objectives, and time and location of the instruction. The strategies used are those that were developed by the planners. Again, it is important to emphasize the necessity of personalizing the inservice program to the individual needs of each of the teachers. Provision needs to be made for learning styles and previous knowledge and skill. It is also important that you plan for plenty of follow up. You had better be ready to help your teachers when they start using their new skills in the classroom.

Transparency #9

THE STAFF DEVELOPMENT PLAN

4. EVALUATION

* Collection of Data

* Emphasis on Teacher and Student Behavior and Attitudes

* Staff Development Program Evaluation

The final step of the staff development plan is evaluation. It is here that you begin the data gathering process that was identified by the planners during the planning process. A variety of techniques are available including questionnaires, classroom observation, interview, and eventually, student achievement data. The emphasis should be placed on a change in teachers' attitudes and classroom performance.

THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

We would like to conclude our presentation by placing special emphasis on the importance of the principal in the success of a staff development program.

The principal is the key to success. As a leader he/she must be able to show a strong commitment to the staff development program and its basic purposes. He/she must be knowledgeable about early adolescents and their special intellectual/academic, social/emotional, and physical developmental needs. He/she must also be able to get others involved and committed. Trust, confidence, and belief in each teacher must be demonstrated. Every teacher must be respected as a leader and given leadership opportunities. Teachers must see themselves as significant

contributors to the total school program. The principal must also realize that he/she cannot do it all. The art of effective delegation must be learned and practiced.

CONCLUSION

We have not tried to present a canned plan that you can take and apply to your school. The ideas we have presented should be used as guidelines and adpated for your unique school situation.

We all like to dream that things are simple -- that there is a ready-made solution to our problem, and that we can just use what someone else has found successful. Ready-to-implement staff development programs that exactly meet your needs just do not exist.

What we are trying to say is that working for more effective staff development programs for middle level schools is not an easy task. It take flexibility. It takes time...commitment...leadership.

It is a tremendous challenge.

Can you afford to do it? The real challenge is "Can you afford not to do it if you care about providing the best possible program for middle level students."